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# THE NATIONAL CHILD CARE STAFFING STUDY REVISITED

## FOUR YEARS IN THE LIFE OF CENTER-BASED CHILD CARE

CHILD CARE EMPLOYEE PROJECT

# NATIONAL CHILD CARE STAFFING STUDY REVISITED:
## Four Years in the Life of Center-Based Child Care


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# THE NATIONAL CHILD CARE STAFFING STUDY REVISITED: FOUR YEARS IN THE LIFE OF CENTER-BASED CHILD CARE

## INTRODUCTION

Our nation has adopted a child care policy that relies upon an unseen, unacknowledged subsidy--the poverty-level wages that child care providers earn for their critically important and highly demanding work. This policy is a by-product of the growing demand for child care services, the limited ability or inclination of many consumers to pay the true cost of care, and only modest government and corporate support for child care.

In 1988, the National Child Care Staffing Study revealed that the average wage of teaching staff in child care centers was $5.35 per hour, roughly a 25% decline in real earnings for this work force since the mid-1970s. Even those with a B.A. degree earned, on average, only $6.50 per hour--less than half of what working women with B.A.s typically earn. Despite a high exposure to illness on the job, fewer than one-third of the teaching staff had health insurance, and even fewer had a pension plan. Ninety-eight percent of teaching staff in the study were women, roughly one-third were women of color, and the vast majority were in their childbearing years (Whitebook et al., 1989).[1]

As we are painfully realizing, the nation's unofficial child care funding "policy" provides a very shaky foundation for a structure to house and nurture our young children while their parents earn a living. The typical child care center in the Staffing Study had lost over 40% of its teaching staff in the prior year alone--a threefold increase in turnover since the mid-1970s. The loss of so many trained and qualified child care workers in recent years has left its mark, with a dangerous decline in the quality of center-based child care available to American families (Whitebook et al., 1989; Kisker et al., 1991). Infants and toddlers, the most vulnerable age group, appear to be exposed to the poorest care of all.

Ironically, while our child care system has been deteriorating, high-quality child care and early education programs have achieved prominent mention as key components of any strategy to revitalize the American economy and to ease the poverty and despair of our country's urban communities. Child care has been identified as indispensable to parents seeking to enter and stay in the work force, to families struggling to avoid or escape from welfare dependency, to families in stress who do not want to lose their children to foster care, and to the entire nation in its goal of promoting young children's readiness for school.

Child care can make, and indeed has made, a critical difference to the success of welfare reform, family preservation and school readiness initiatives. But its effectiveness is entirely dependent on the skill and stability of the thousands of women who are the backbone of our child care system. Without qualified and committed teachers, child care is at best an inadequate tool for achieving pressing national goals. At worst, it is a harmful one that undermines not only our nation's economic progress but our children's development. Children in centers with inadequately prepared teachers and high turnover rates have been found to spend large portions of their day in aimless "activity," unengaged with teachers, other children or learning materials. Not surprisingly, such children tend to show delays in language and social development (Whitebook et al., 1989).

1. National Child Care Staffing Study data were collected between January and August 1988, and released in October 1989.

These facts are well documented. They have led the National Task Force on School Readiness, among others, to urge federal, state and community actions to upgrade child care staff compensation and training (NTFSR, 1991). *Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation* noted the prevalence of "poorly paid and poorly trained teachers" in American child care programs, and concluded that "in the end, high-quality child care depends on high-quality staff" (Boyer, 1991). In *Heart Start: The Emotional Foundations of School Readiness* (NCCIP, 1992), the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs proposed that the federal government "begin to bridge the gap between what families can afford to pay and what child care really costs if staff are paid appropriately." Both Head Start and Military Child Care programs have taken significant steps to increase teacher salaries—but only a small proportion of children who attend child care will be touched by these efforts.

It is in this context that we returned to the centers that had participated in the National Child Care Staffing Study four years before. The original, widely-publicized study was conducted in 227 licensed, full-day centers in five major metropolitan areas: Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Phoenix and Seattle. The study documented "barely adequate" and deteriorating quality in this sample of community-based child care centers, and it confirmed the vast body of research indicating a correlation between child care quality and children's development.

But beyond this, the National Child Care Staffing Study told a story of highly educated and trained teachers who love their jobs, but who leave them at disturbingly high rates because of the economic hardship caused by their minimal wages and benefits. Perhaps most importantly, teachers who earned the highest wages were more sensitive, consistent and appropriate in their interactions with children. (For more detailed information, see "Highlights of Major Findings and Recommendations" (1988) on p. 14.)

More than any previous research effort, the National Child Care Staffing Study made it apparent that as long as we fail to resolve the staff compensation crisis, we are shortchanging child care's capacity to nurture children, assist families, or meet any of its widely heralded policy goals.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF 1992 MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In 1988 the National Child Care Staffing Study exposed the minimally adequate and deteriorating quality that characterized many of our nation's full-day child care centers and linked this poor quality to the inadequate compensation available to child care teaching staff.

In 1992, 85% of the 227 centers that participated in the original Staffing Study remained open. Their directors, 60% of whom were the same as in 1988, participated in telephone interviews to provide an updated portrait of typical center-based car.. We found that:

***Teaching staff continue to earn exceptionally low wages compared to other, often less educated and trained members of the civilian labor force.***

- Real wages for the lowest paid teaching assistants, the fastest growing segment of the child care work force, have declined since 1988 to $5.08 an hour. This translates to an annual salary of $8,890 per year.

- Real wages for the highest paid teaching staff, who constitute a very small segment of the work force, have improved only modestly, approximately 66 cents an hour over the past four years. This translates to an annual salary of $15,488 per year.

***Despite exposure to illness on the job, the overwhelming majority of centers offered their teaching staff no or limited health insurance.***

- Only 27% of centers provided fully paid health insurance for their teaching staff, and of these 32% did not cover assistant teachers.

***Turnover of teaching staff continues to be high, threatening the ability of centers to offer consistent services to children.***

- Between 1988 and 1992, 70% of the teaching staff interviewed in 1988 had left their jobs.
- Those earning $5.00 per hour or less in 1988 left at a rate of 77% compared to the 53% turnover rate of teaching staff earning over $7.00 an hour.
- Turnover between 1991 and 1992 dropped to 26%, but still remains close to three times the annual turnover of 9.6% reported by all U.S. companies, and well above the 5.6% turnover rate reported for public school teachers.

Unless efforts are made to improve the compensation of teaching staff, children will continue to experience highly unstable child care. We therefore reiterate our earlier recommendation that child care teaching staff salaries be raised. Specifically, we recommend that the new administration take the following actions:

- To assure the health of child care providers and children, implement a means of comprehensive, affordable health coverage, which does not reduce current wage rates, for all child care teachers and providers who work in licensed facilities by 1995 .
- To restore equity in quality for all federal child care programs, model all new and reauthorized federal funding for early care and education, including the Child Care and Development Block Grant, after the 1990 Head Start Reauthorization which mandated that 25% of funds be spent on quality enhancements, half of which are earmarked for salaries.
- To promote the necessary skills for child care employment, increase access to higher education opportunities for those who are currently employed in the child care field, as well as those considering such careers, through the expansion of loan forgiveness, grants and other programs that reward those who choose to work with young children.
- To clarify current and future social policies, increase support for research that identifies factors that promote long-term stability and productivity in the child care work force and examines low income families' equity of access to quality child care across the full array of programs that receive federal support ranging from Head Start to child care that is supported through welfare legislation.
- To provide comprehensive high quality child care to families of all incomes without relying on the subsidies provided by the child care work force through their low wages, create a commission on the economics of child care to examine how current federal and state policies (such as reimbursement rates and tax credits) contribute to the poverty level wages endemic to the early care and education field and how new financing options could be developed.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

There were three primary reasons for our decision to re-visit the sample of centers that had participated in the National Child Care Staffing Study:

- At present, there is no longitudinal, multi-year data on the quality of child care in the United States, and other past studies have been difficult to compare because of disparities in research methods. The availability of the 1988 NCCSS sample was, therefore, a rare opportunity to establish a longer-term research sample and body of knowledge than has been available before.

- The growing urgency of the nation's child care and economic crises compelled us to find out what kinds of changes, for better or worse, are taking place in this particular sample of child care centers, and to provide a preliminary portrait of current trends. Anecdotal reports had indicated that while high unemployment was reducing child care usage during this economically troubled period, causing some centers to close and many to limit expenditures that affect quality; it has also reduced the employment options available to child care teaching staff who are dissatisfied with their present jobs.

- Because of major changes in federal child care policy and funding since 1988 - - including several new programs through the Family Support Act, Title IV - A (At-Risk Child Care) and the Child Care and Development Block Grant, as well as the infusion of millions of additional dollars into existing programs, such as Head Start and Military Child Care - - we were eager to learn what impact, if any, such changes had made on our original sample of centers. While these new sources of revenue signaled a welcome and long-awaited response to child care needs, at least one recent report indicated that this large-scale federal policy experiment, as presently conceived, was likely to have limited effects on child care quality (Children's Defense Fund, 1992). During this period, for instance, many states had changed their child care regulations and adjusted their own levels of child care funding - - some for the better, but most for the worse.

Thus, we revisited the National Child Care Staffing Study in 1992 to:

- Conduct a longitudinal study of child care work force stability.

- Assess any changes in program quality, particularly in terms of the measurements of compensation, turnover and accreditation.

- Seek evidence of any increase in public resources in these centers.

What could we learn about trends in center-based child care, either positive or negative, during this period of social change, to guide future research and/or the development of new and revised economic and child care policies? The availability of baseline data on child care quality from the National Child Care Staffing Study gave us the unique opportunity to obtain answers to this timely and vital question.

The data reported here are limited, insofar as they derive from a feasibility study conducted to determine whether a full-scale, observational follow-up of the original 227 centers could be implemented and could provide valuable data. Through telephone interviews, however, we were able to collect significant information about the following quality indicators: staff turnover, teaching staff compensation, and accreditation status with the National Association for the Education of Young Children. We were also able to

ascertain shifts in the scope of services, including the ages and numbers of children enrolled and the share of centers enrolling subsidized children.

## SAMPLE AND METHODS

The sample for this update consisted of child care centers, first assessed as part of the National Child Care Staffing Study in 1988, which were still in operation in the Spring of 1992. The original sample of 227 centers were located in five metropolitan areas: Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Phoenix and Seattle. These sites were selected because they represent the diversity of center-based child care throughout the country. All centers provided full-day care, year-round, and were licensed by the state. They were located in low-, middle- and high-income, urban and suburban neighborhoods, in proportion to the total numbers of centers in these sub-areas in each study site. Screening interviews with participating and non-participating centers suggested that the 227 centers in the original sample were of somewhat higher quality than those who declined to participate.

The 1992 sample consisted of 193 centers that were still in operation, constituting 85% of the original sample. One center still in operation did not participate. The remaining 33 centers had closed. Four of the centers still in operation had switched to providing part-day care, but all others continued to provide full-day care. There were no differences by site in sample attrition. We did not attempt to assess new centers that may have opened in the study sites since 1988, and thus cannot draw conclusions about trends in the overall supply of center-based care.

All 1992 data were gathered through telephone interviews with center directors, and thus did not involve the extensive classroom observations, staff interviews or child assessments conducted in 1988. The interviews provided information about center characteristics, staff compensation and stability, National Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation status, and availability of new public funds. The stability data are particularly rich given that we inquired about current turnover in the participating centers, as well as about the longer-term turnover on the part of the teachers and assistants who were interviewed in these centers in 1988. Directors were asked about previously interviewed staff members by name.

## FINDINGS

### *Demographic Characteristics of Centers*

The 193 centers that participated in the Staffing Study Revisited differed in one important respect from the 227 centers in the original study. For-profit centers (21% of the independent programs, and 23% of programs in regional or national chains) were more likely to have closed than were nonprofit centers (3% of church-run programs and 10% of other nonprofits). As a result, the percentage of for-profit centers declined from 47% in the original sample to 43% in the current sample. Again, without having studied newly opened centers, these percentages should not be misinterpreted as indicating a trend in the auspices of center-based care.

This differential attrition by auspice has an important implication, given that the for-profit centers in the original study were found to provide significantly poorer-quality care than the nonprofit centers. Even if quality remained stable between 1988 and 1992, the 1992 sample would in all likelihood provide a more favorable portrait of child care than we had found in 1988, given the lower proportion of for-profit centers.

Between 1988 and 1992, the average number of children enrolled in the centers did not change significantly. On average, centers served 34 children part-time and 62 for the full day. The age composition of children served also remained very stable. There was only a slight, nonsignificant increase in the proportion of infants and toddlers, and an accompanying minor decline in the share of older children.

### *Child Care Teaching Staff Compensation and Benefits*

We found that the average size of the teaching staff employed in the centers had increased somewhat since 1988, from 14.3 to 16.2. This increase, however, was due entirely to the higher average number of assistant teachers, which rose from 5.8 in 1988 to 7.7 in 1992. Thus, although centers are maintaining or improving their numbers of teaching staff, there has been a dramatic shift from a balance of teachers and assistants towards a greater reliance on assistant teachers. The implementation of more stringent regulations regarding adult/child ratios in two sites may account for the increase in total staff. Given the evidence in the National Child Care Staffing Study that assistant teachers were significantly younger, less well-educated and less adequately trained than teachers, this shift may have a detrimental impact on the quality of caregiving that children experience.

The longitudinal nature of the Staffing Study Revisited enabled us to examine the question of career ladders within child care centers. We found only minimal evidence of opportunities for career advancement within child care centers. Only 12% of those who were assistant teachers in 1988 had become teachers, and only 2% had become directors; among teachers, only 4% had become directors, and 3% had actually been demoted to assistant teachers. Combined with findings from the original study that teacher/directors and teachers earned, on average, only slightly over one dollar more per hour than assistant teachers and aides, this evidence reveals the virtual absence of opportunities for career advancement within a single child care center. To compound matters, there is generally only one director per center and these individuals are generally quite stable, as indicated below. Evidently, to attain advancement, child care workers must either leave their center for another child care position or leave the field.

#### Compensation

The National Child Care Staffing Study found an average hourly wage in 1988 of $5.35 for classroom teaching staff, which results in an annual income of $9,363 for full-time employment (defined as 35 hours per week, 50 weeks per year). A majority of teaching staff in the sample earned less than $5.00 per hour. These salary findings were based on actual earnings reported by the 1,309 participating teachers and assistants in 1988.

In 1992, all salary data were provided by center directors, who were asked to report four actual salaries: those of the highest- and lowest-paid teacher and assistant in their programs. Directors also reported these four salary figures in 1988. At that time directors reported higher wages for individual teaching staff than did the teachers and assistants themselves. Thus, the comparisons between 1988 and 1992 reflect changes in the highest and lowest wages paid to teaching staff as reported by directors, rather than by teachers themselves.

In 1992 child care teaching staff wages remained at subsistence levels. Although there have been modest increases in real wages for the highest paid teachers, this group constitutes a small portion of the center-based teaching staff. In 1988, for example, only one of four teachers (and virtually no assistants) in the participating centers earned this highest level of salary.

## TABLE 1
### Trends in Center-Based Teaching Staff Compensation

| Staff Position | 1992 Wage | 1988 Wage | Real Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lowest Paid Assistant | $5.08 | $5.16 | 1.5% Decrease |
| Highest Paid Assistant | $6.05 | $5.98 | 1.2% Increase |
| Lowest Paid Teacher | $6.50 | $6.35 | 2.4% Increase |
| Highest Paid Teacher | $8.85 | $8.19 | 8.0% Increase |

**Note: All wages, and the 1988-92 trends, are in 1992 dollars. Each category reflects average wages for the position.**

Moreover, as a result of the very low baseline salaries of even the highest paid teachers ($6.88 in 1988), the 8% increase amounts to an additional 66 cents per hour, in inflated dollars, over the course of four years.

For the lowest paid teaching assistants, the fastest growing segment of the child care work force, there has been a decline in real wages. For the remainder of the child care work force there has been almost no real improvement in compensation. Finally, the 1992 data replicated the original study's finding that the wages of teaching staff in for-profit centers are significantly lower than those of their colleagues in nonprofit centers.

Child care teaching staff in 1992, as in 1988, continue to earn less than half as much as comparably educated women and less than one-third as much as comparably educated men in the civilian labor force. As indicated in Figures 1 and 2, even the highest paid teachers in 1992, 70% of whose counterparts in 1988 had completed some college or a bachelor's degree, earned barely half as much as a male who has only completed high school and only two thirds as much as women who have completed high school but have no college background. It is possible that the increase in wages that we have documented is due, in part, to the increase in the minimum wage to $4.25 per hour in the intervening years. In 1988, 29% of the 1,300 teachers we interviewed were earning less than $4.25 per hour.

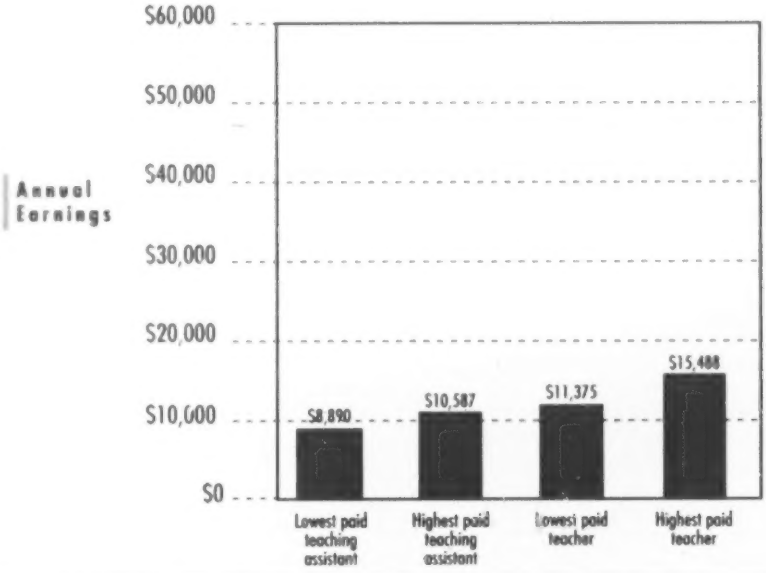
### Benefits

In 1988 only one out of three teaching staff interviewed received any health insurance coverage through their employer. Other than sick leave and paid holidays, the only benefit offered to a majority of the teaching staff was a reduced fee for child care services for their own children. Those earning the lowest wages received the fewest of any of these benefits.

In 1992 we focused our benefits-related questions on health care, given the current political salience of this issue. We asked directors about the type of health insurance coverage available to their staff and whether the center paid all or a part of the monthly insurance premiums. We were not able to obtain information about the

## FIGURE 1

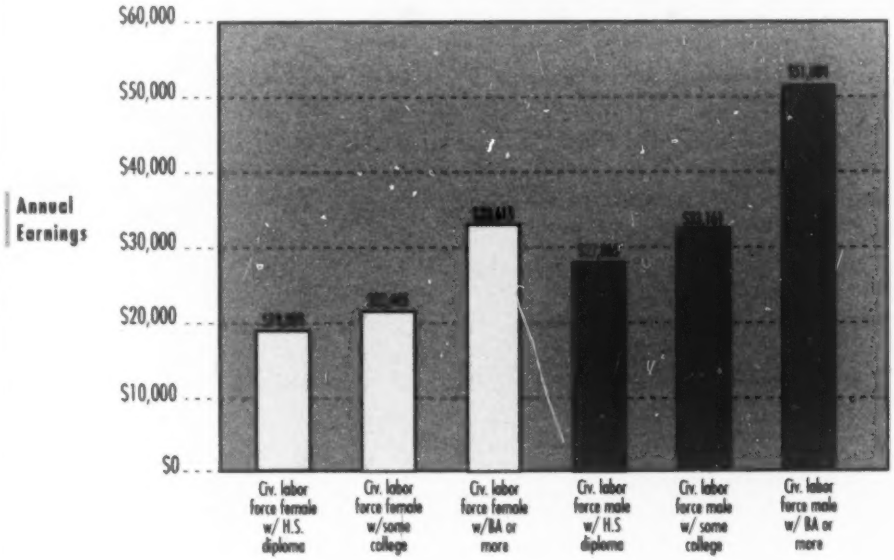
### Average Wages of Child Care Teaching Staff, 1992




NOTE: Full-time annual earnings based on 35 hours per week/50 weeks per year - the average work week of teaching staff in the original sample. In the original sample, 34% of all teaching staff had completed some college education and 22% had completed a B.A. or more. Forty-four percent of assistants and 26% of teachers had earned a high school diploma or less, 37% of assistants and 44% of teachers had completed some college and 18.5% of assistants and 31% of teachers had completed a B.A. or more.

## FIGURE 2

### Average Wages of Civilian Labor Force, 1992




NOTE: Full-time annual earnings based on 35 hours or more per week/52 weeks per year. All wages are 1992 dollars. Includes workers 18 years and older.

- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (1991) *Current Population Reports.* Money Income of Households, Families, and Persons in the United States, Series P-60, No. 180, Table 30.

scope of the coverage available in terms of the range and level of services provided or the existence of deductible or co-payment charges for various services. Thus, it is important to recognize that even those staff whose premiums were fully paid by the center may face additional charges when they seek health services. Given their extremely low wages, these charges may be difficult or impossible to meet, particularly in the case of chronic or catastrophic illness.

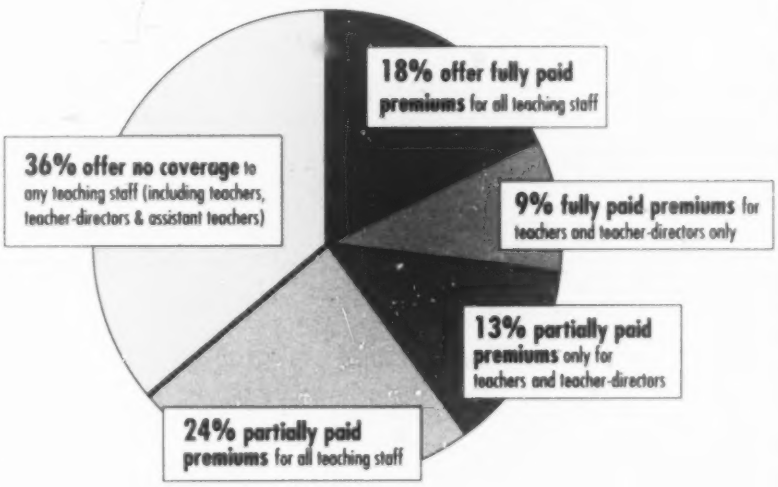
The majority of centers that were revisited in 1992 had neither improved nor reduced their health coverage. For example, 78% of the centers that paid no health benefits in 1988 still did not provide coverage in 1992. As a consequence, in 1992, 36% of the centers offered no health benefits, and of those that did offer coverage, 58% provided only partial payment. Only 27% of the centers provided full health coverage for their teaching staff and a substantial share of these (32%) provided coverage only for teachers, not assistant teachers.

In this context of consistently poor health coverage, there were some indications of deteriorating benefits. Forty percent of the centers that offered full coverage in 1988 had changed to partial or no coverage; of those offering no coverage in 1988, only 22% had changed to partial (18%) or full (4%) coverage. In addition, 35% of the centers that included dependents in health benefits in 1988 no longer did so. When only those centers providing fully paid coverage are considered, this percentage climbs to 53% that did not include dependents. To place these figures in context, as of 1988, 41% of the teaching staff had children of their own, half of them not yet of school-age.

Like other American workers, the child care work force faces tenuous, and shrinking, support for their health care expenses. But in child care, given teachers' daily exposure to illness, and, in turn, the children's exposure to oftentimes sick teachers, this inadequate support for health care benefits poses an especially serious risk.

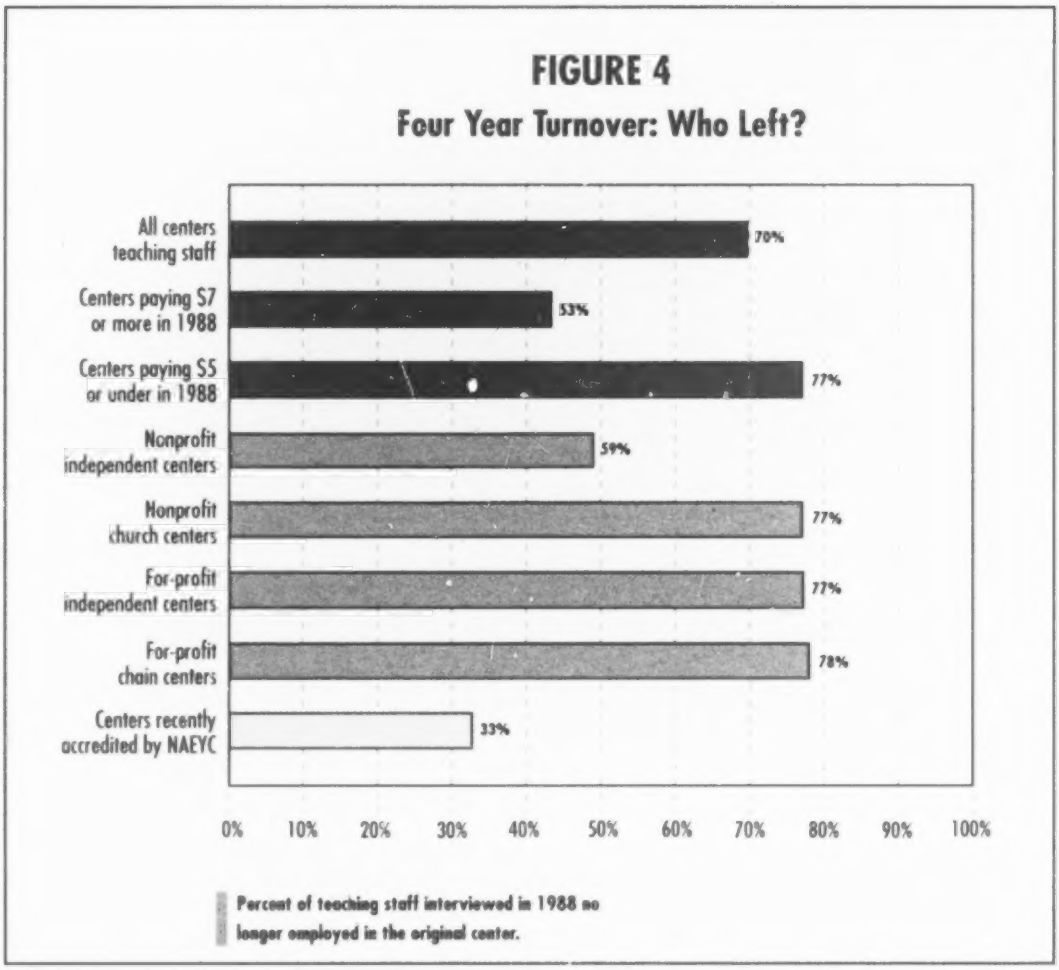
**FIGURE 3**

**Percentage of All Centers Offering Health Benefits**


18% offer fully paid premiums for all teaching staff
9% fully paid premiums for teachers and teacher-directors only
13% partially paid premiums only for teachers and teacher-directors
24% partially paid premiums for all teaching staff
36% offer no coverage to any teaching staff (including teachers, teacher-directors & assistant teachers)

### *Teaching Staff Turnover*

Turnover in child care has become the focus of much concern given the combined evidence that high turnover is endemic in child care and that it is detrimental to children. Staff turnover averaged 41%, as reported by directors, in the original Staffing Study. A second, recent study of typical center-based care has replicated this 40% turnover rate (Scarr, Phillips, McCartney & Abbott-Shim, 1992). Even studies




that include part-day Head Start and school-based programs among their sample consistently report annual turnover rates around 25% (see Kisker et al., 1991). A striking comparison is offered by public school teachers who left their jobs at a rate of 5.6% in 1987-88 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1992).

### Short-Term Turnover

Center directors were also asked about recent turnover rates, and provided evidence of greater stability than was the case four years earlier. Average turnover in the year immediately prior to our 1992 interviews was 26%. Sixteen percent of the directors reported no turnover over the past two years. Yet, even this relatively lower recent turnover figure of 26% is close to three times the annual turnover of 9.6% reported by all U.S. companies in 1992, and double the 12% turnover rate reported by non-business companies (including government, school, and other nonprofit organizations) (Bureau of National Affairs, 1992).

Between 1988 and 1992, all sites experienced a substantial increase in unemployment which typically reduces job opportunities.

Thus, the decrease in staff turnover may be partially due to the loss of alternative job options and, accordingly may be shortlived as the economy improves. Even in the currently tight job market, child care centers have more difficulty than other employers in retaining staff. Our findings also raise the possibility that regulatory, as well as economic, factors influence turnover. The two sites that showed the most dramatic improvement in turnover rates both achieved regulatory changes which substantially improved the ratios of children to adults, suggesting that child care teaching staff experienced a noticeable improvement in their daily work environment. This change may have affected their tenure. It is open to question whether ratio changes alone, however, can stabilize the work force or improve the quality of services over time.

### Long-Term Turnover

In 1992, directors were asked about the teaching staff who had been interviewed in their centers in 1988. We did not inquire about the current whereabouts of the staff who had left the centers. It is entirely possible that some turnover reflects individuals who remain in the field. In 1988, this was the case for one out of three teaching staff who had left their centers six months following our initial interviews.

Since 1988, only 30% of the teaching staff were still employed in the same centers. Thus, in the four years since the original study, over two-thirds of the teaching staff of these programs had left. Only four centers reported no turnover from the original sample of teaching staff. Turnover also differed by auspice of centers. Independent non profit centers reported the lowest four year turnover rates, 59% on average compared to a range of 77% to 78% in other types of centers: nonprofit church, independent for-profit and for-profit chains. The directors were notably more stable; 60% had remained at the same center. The loss of teaching staff in the 15% of centers that had closed since 1988 added to the vast instability that characterizes the child care work force.

### Who Stayed? Who Left?

Teachers who remained in their jobs differed in several respects from those who had left. The most important predictor of who had stayed or left was the 1988 level of wages. Of those teachers earning $5.00 per hour or less in 1988, 77% had left; of those earning over $7.00 per hour, 53% had left. This finding confirms the strong link between wages and turnover revealed by the National Child Care Staffing Study, and indicates that this relation holds, prospectively, over time. The availability of health benefits also had a significant influence on long-term turnover.

Lead teachers and teacher-directors had lower turnover rates (64%) than did assistant teachers and aides (77%). Older teachers and women of color, particularly African-Americans, were significantly more likely to remain in their jobs. Although we can only speculate about these findings, they suggest that tenure is affected by such factors as race and age, which can limit other avenues of employment.

The levels of education and training that teaching staff had completed as of 1988 also predicted turnover, although to a much lesser extent than wages, age and ethnicity. What these data suggest is that investments in training and education have little impact on center-level teaching staff turnover unless they are accompanied by investments in higher compensation. Without salary improvements, training initiatives may in practice merely train teaching staff for their next jobs, some of which will be in child care and many of which will be in other fields.

### *Center Accreditation Status*

As a quality improvement initiative, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) launched a project in 1985 to accredit centers that voluntarily participate and meet a set of quality guidelines. Accredited centers are uniformly considered to provide good-quality care. In 1988, 14 of the 227 centers (6.5%) had been accredited by NAEYC. These accredited centers had staff with more formal education and more training, lower turnover rates, and they provided more developmentally appropriate activities and higher-quality caregiving for the children.

In 1992 each of the 14 centers that was accredited in 1988 remained open, but five (36%) had not renewed their accreditation. By 1992 11 additional centers had become accredited, bringing the current total to 20 accredited centers. It appears that the process of becoming accredited enhances center quality. For example, the recently accredited centers had the lowest four year turnover rate (33%) and paid higher wages to teachers and assistants than all other centers in the sample. Programs that continued their accreditation also had lower four year turnover and higher wages than non-accredited centers. Centers whose accreditation had expired looked no different in terms of turnover and wages in 1992 than those centers that had not sought accreditation.

### *Availability of Government Subsidies*

In 1992, 85% of the centers reported receiving some government subsidy for children attending their programs, compared to only 62% of all centers in 1988. However, of the centers that remained open in 1992, 72% of them had enrolled subsidized children in 1988, suggesting somewhat smaller growth in the share of subsidized centers. In fact, 77% of the centers that had closed since 1988 had served subsidized children and close to one-fifth of them had subsidized 50% or more of the children in their care.

The picture that emerges is one in which a group of subsidized centers, some with substantial numbers of subsidized children, closed between 1988 and 1992. During this same time, however, some centers that previously had not enrolled any subsidized children began to accept government subsidies. Consistent with this proposed trend is the fact that most of the growth in centers with subsidized children was concentrated in centers that enrolled only a few subsidized children (20% or less of total enrollment). These centers grew from 28% of all centers in the 1988 sample to 44% of the centers in the 1992 sample. Centers that accepted subsidized children in 1992 but did not in 1988 were two times less likely to provide health benefits to their staff than centers that had been serving subsidized children from 1988 to 1992.

These findings suggest that the substantial increase in federal funding for child care that has occurred since 1988 has promoted an increase in the share of licensed child care centers that enroll subsidized children, as intended. We do not know from these data whether more children (as compared to more centers) are receiving subsidies. However, some of this growth in subsidized centers has compensated for a loss of subsidized centers since 1988. We cannot accurately estimate the net increase in centers that enroll subsidized children. Without further research we can only speculate on the quality of care received by these children, although the indications are worrisome given the findings about health benefits for staff, coupled with the generally low wages in the sample.

## CONCLUSION

Over recent years a consensus has emerged that high quality early childhood services are essential to the developmental well-being of our children and families and the economic well-being of the nation. The National Child Care Staffing Study raised serious concerns about the quality of services many American children receive, largely because their caregivers were so desperately underpaid. The Staffing Study Revisited suggests that the overall quality of centers remains worrisome as indicated by the low wages, lack of health coverage and high turnover among child care teaching staff. As a nation we like to believe that children are our most precious resource; our current child care delivery system reveals a very different reality. America depends on child care teachers. Our future depends on valuing them.

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# THE NATIONAL CHILD CARE STAFFING STUDY, 1988
## HIGHLIGHTS OF MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Child Care Staffing Study explored how teaching staff and their working conditions affect the caliber of center-based child care available in the United States. Teaching staff includes all staff who provide direct care to children. Following are highlights of the major findings of the National Child Care Staffing Study:

***The education of child care teaching staff and the arrangement of their work environment are essential determinants of the quality of services children receive.***

- Teaching staff provided more sensitive and appropriate caregiving if they completed more years of formal education, received early childhood training at the college level, earned higher wages and better benefits, and worked in centers devoting a higher percentage of the operating budget to teaching personnel.

***The most important predictor of the quality of care children receive, among the adult work environment variables, is staff wages.***

The quality of services provided by most centers was rated as barely adequate. Better quality centers had:

- higher wages
- better adult work environments
- lower teaching staff turnover
- better educated and trained staff
- more teachers caring for fewer children
- Better quality centers were more likely to be operated on a nonprofit basis, to be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, to be located in states with higher quality standards and to meet adult-child ratios, group size and staff training provisions contained in the 1980 Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements.

***Despite having higher levels of formal education than the average American worker, child care teaching staff earn abysmally low wages.***

- In 1988, this predominately female work force earned an average hourly wage of $5.35.
- In the last decade, child care staff wages, when adjusted for inflation have decreased more than 20%.
- Child care teaching staff earn less than half as much as comparably educated women and less than one-third as much as comparably educated men in the civilian labor force.

***Staff turnover has nearly tripled in the last decade, jumping from 15% in 1977 to 41% in 1988.***

- The most important determinant of staff turnover among the adult work environment variables was staff wages.
- Teaching staff earning the lowest wages are twice as likely to leave their jobs as those earning the highest wages.

***Children attending lower-quality centers and centers with more staff turnover were less competent in language and social development.***

- Low and high-income children were more likely than middle income children to attend centers providing higher quality care.

***Compared with a decade ago, child care centers in the United States receive fewer governmental funds, are more likely to be operated on a for-profit basis, and care for a larger number of infants.***

# The National Child Care Staffing Study

If you would like to order additional copies of *The National Child Care Staffing Study Revisited* or copies of the original 1988 study reports, (*Who Cares? Child Care Teachers and the Quality of Care in America*) please mail the coupon below to:

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